

DESIGNER



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PHOENIX RISING



Above: Shards of contrasting blue and green tiles create a brilliant mosaic at the base of the entrance door ■ Below: The zinc front door includes a peephole made of a Chinese woodcarving fittingly depicting a rising Phoenix



Fu-Tung Cheng transforms a standard Los Gatos mission-style home into an Asian-influenced custom contemporary masterpiece

The couple who own the Los Gatos, CA, Spanish mission-style stucco-clad home, which dates back to the 1930s, had just wanted to replace their leaky roof. But during the demolition process, they realized that they were not in love with their architect's design. "I liked the architect's work, but I wanted a special house, one that more uniquely reflected my taste and style. His work is modern, but it tends to be a bit on the plain side of modern," says one of the owners. "When the framing was done, I could see it was going to be the same old house, just a little bigger. I knew this was going to be my only chance to have my 'dream house.'"

The owners halted construction and, upon the recommendation of their close friend and interior designer, Chadline Flood Gong, they called Berkeley, CA, designer, Fu-Tung Cheng, Cheng Design. Though not a studied architect, Fu-Tung has designed six custom homes, including two made entirely of concrete, is currently designing another home in Pennsylvania and has had extensive experience in large-scale home remodels.

Fu-Tung redesigned nearly the entire 3-bedroom, 2 1/2-bath home, with the exception of the baths and the basement. The remodel included a new façade with inset, copper clad bay windows at the living room and kitchen, a volume-enhanced alcove ceiling with uplighting in the master bedroom suite and a renovated kitchen.

Fu-Tung's aesthetic—a blend of custom touches, contemporary minimalism and organic warmth with subtle Asian influence—complements Chadline Flood Gong's interior design style, which is "design with a Japanese touch," yet harmonizes with the home's Spanish mission-style architecture.

"I didn't want the home to feel like it had a split personality between the red-clay tile roof, adobe exterior and the clients' preference for an Asian aesthetic," says Fu-Tung. "Like world music, I wanted to blend stylistic rhythms from the home's classical Latin roots with a fusion of Asian modern."



Above: The integral concrete sink includes a custom copper strainer ■ Opposite page (top): The entry canopy is made of steel and delicately interwoven twigs that lace just beneath the glass surface



Above: The island supports a large three-inch thick mahogany prep table cantilevered over a sculptural, freestanding concrete pedestal with integral sink ■ Below: A soffit made of steel and translucent honeycomb Panelite defines the foyer ■ Bottom: The stepped charcoal-color, concrete hearth sits below an eggshell-colored plaster fireplace façade with geometric, steel-framed vents. The dining area is next to the living room area in the same room. The kitchen lies through a wide doorway

"I wanted to introduce a sense of richness without being extravagant. Concrete, stainless steel, plaster and other natural materials have been used to create an environment that's tactile, earthy and sophisticated—all at the same time," Fu-Tung explains.

DEFINED ENTRANCE

The owners wanted the entrance reworked. Prior to the remodel, there wasn't a foyer or welcoming area for guests, who would enter and step directly into the middle of the living room. Fu-Tung designed a welcoming entrance that begins on the outside with a canopy made of glass, steel and delicately interwoven twigs.

The zinc-clad pivot door is framed with a custom surround. Shards of contrasting blue and green tiles create a brilliant mosaic that flank the base of the frame on both sides, while porcelain, crackle-glazed, hand-made tiles and olive-colored concrete frame the rest of the door.

The satin-finished, stainless steel, front door pull by British sculptor Paul Mason projects the appearance of an ancient Egyptian spear. The most unique feature of the door is the integration of an apt Chinese woodcarving of a rising Phoenix that serves as a peephole window.

Once inside, a soffit made of steel and translucent honeycomb Panelite from 3-Form hovers above the entry hall, providing an inviting



glow from recessed incandescent light fixtures. A zinc-clad column frames one side of the entrance and intersects a bank of mahogany and Plyboo bamboo cabinets.

The focal point of the living/dining room is stepped charcoal-colored, concrete hearth that sits below an eggshell-colored plaster fireplace façade with geometric, steel-framed vents. The dining area is next to the living room area in the same room. The kitchen is situated conveniently through a wide doorway.



FUNCTIONAL SCULPTURE

A custom Plyboo bamboo buffet with a celadon-color Cheng Geocrete™ concrete countertop wraps around the wall from the dining area to the kitchen. In an unexpected turn into the kitchen-side of the adjoining wall, the countertop serves as a cook surface with an integrated Gaggenau cooktop and oven. Brass inlays function as trivets for hot pots on both sides of the cooktop. A wall of multicolored China Gold slate is both a backsplash and a display of soft tones of gold, grey, blue and rust hues.

The kitchen features a Cheng custom-plastered hood, which has a built-in utensil rod and custom steel shelving that keep spices close to the cook. The hood liner is by FanTech and the fan is from Thermador.

Stainless steel counters merge with concrete counters in a multi-level format. The double-basin stainless steel main sink, served by a Grohe pull-out spray faucet, is set within a stainless steel countertop. The remaining perimeter countertops are Geocrete™ concrete, which is Fu-Tung's proprietary concrete mix. Custom Plyboo bamboo cabinetry with stainless bar pulls or tab pulls offer ample storage while maintaining a clean look.

The island supports a large, three-inch thick mahogany food prep table cantilevered over a sculptural, freestanding terracotta-tone concrete pedestal with integral sink, which is, in turn, fitted with a custom copper strainer and complemented by a Hansgrohe pull-out spray faucet. The conical-shaped unit houses a pull-out container for compost, a garbage bin and a disposal. Directly below the mahogany top, a cast-iron steel grate from Urban Accessories forms a low platform for storage just above the floor.

"The scale of the concrete island was deliberately made large and thick to anchor the kitchen," says Fu-Tung. "I wanted it to serve as a kind of functional sculpture. The whole island was cast in our shop.

"People really want differentiation, something personal, something custom. Concrete can do



Right: The counter corner detail reveals the true custom nature of the project ■ Below left: The main stainless steel sink is flanked by a stainless steel countertop ■ Below right: The kitchen enjoys daylight through windows above the sink as well as window walls in the breakfast nook. The island has been designed to serve as a functional sculpture





Above: The island counter is made with mahogany and Geocrete concrete ■ Bottom: An ammonite shell has been imbedded into the countertop ■ Right (top): Attention to detail is seen in the roof structure and the interesting geometric patterning of the window panes ■ (middle and bottom): The compost and trash bins are built into a pull-out drawer in the conical sink support

that for them," he says. He artfully worked a sense of surprise into the concrete with an ammonite fossil inlay and tile fragments.

The kitchen includes state-of-the-art appliances. In addition to the Gaggenau cooktop and oven, there is a Sub-Zero refrigerator, a Sub-Zero under-counter model, and a Fisher-Paykel integrated dishwasher, all with bamboo overlay panels. The GE microwave, concealed behind a drop-down cabinet door, has a stainless steel finish. The stainless washer and dryer are from Miele. Both sinks are equipped with InSinkErator disposers.

The plaster walls of taupe and burnt sienna form a bright, engaging room with plenty of natural light pouring in from unadorned windows. Recessed halogen downlights and under-cabinet illumination brighten the kitchen by night.

The Brazilian cherry wood flooring, which features a dark brown grain, is inset with Geocrete™ concrete accent tiles.

Sliding doors, traditionally used in Japanese homes to divide and conceal interiors, are installed at the entry into the master bedroom suite, which is off the kitchen, and are used as pantry doors

in the kitchen. They are made of panel laminates that have the appearance of woven bear grass, duplicating the natural, earthy element of the woven twigs at the exterior canopy.

The owners, pleased with their Phoenix-like home, which rose again from the ashes, comment: "Not only did we get everything we wanted, we got so much more. It's beautiful, artistic and welcoming. Like art, there is so much to see: captivating touches that don't yell at you, but wait patiently for your eye to engage." 📍



case study

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